

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jason Miccolo Johnson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson, Jason Miccolo
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson,
Dates:	July 23, 2003 and July 29, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:57:20).
Abstract:	Photographer Jason Miccolo Johnson (1956 -) was a largely self-taught photographer who worked for ABC News and USA Today before becoming a freelancer. His photography projects included notables such as Thurgood Marshall and Nelson Mandela, as well as Fortune 500 companies. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 23, 2003 and July 29, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_166
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born November 21, 1956, in Hayti, Missouri, photographer Jason Miccolo Johnson is one of five children. Johnson received most of his education in Memphis, Tennessee. He started his college education at Memphis State University before relocating to Washington, D.C., to attend Howard University. Johnson graduated from Howard in 1994.

Largely self-taught, Johnson served in the U.S. Navy as a photographer. He went on from 1981 to 1982 to work for ABC News as a production assistant. Then, in 1985, Johnson joined *USA Today* as the photography lab director, a position he held until 1989. In May 1989, Johnson decided to enter the world of freelance, doing portrait photographs of leaders such as Thurgood Marshall and Nelson Mandela. He also developed a healthy stable of Fortune 500 clients such as McDonald's and Anheuser-Busch. Johnson was also chosen as one of the photographers for both of President Bill Clinton's inaugurations, as well as for the Million Man March.

Johnson is active with the American Society of Media Photographers and works with Beacon House, a neighborhood organization that supports at-risk youth in Washington, D.C. He also lectures on photography at conferences and universities throughout the United States.

Johnson's work has appeared in *Black Enterprise*, *Entrepreneur*, *Glamour*, *Newsweek*, *Essence*, *Ebony* and *Time*. His work can also be seen on permanent display in the St. Louis Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Art in Houston, as well as in numerous exhibitions both in the United States and abroad. Johnson has published more than fifteen books. His latest is entitled, *Soul Sanctuary: Images of the African American Worship Experience*. Johnson resides in Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 23, 2003 and July 29, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Jason Miccolo Johnson (1956 -) was a largely self-taught photographer who worked for ABC News and USA Today before becoming a freelancer. His photography projects included notables such as Thurgood Marshall and Nelson Mandela, as well as Fortune 500 companies.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Johnson, Jason Miccolo

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Jason Miccolo--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Photographer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, July 23, 2003 and July 29, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson was born on November 21, 1956 in Hayti, Missouri which was segregated and the black and white areas eventually split into separate towns. His mother, Vida Johnson, was born in Grenada, Mississippi in 1919. She had a fifth-grade education and worked as a domestic. He recalls few details about his mother, since she died when he was three years old, but her

death may have been due to childbirth or complications with pregnancy. His father, Boyd Johnson, was born in Eupora, Mississippi. Although Johnson's father had only a third-grade education, he was very knowledgeable, adept at finding natural medicines and saving their home from pressure damage during a storm. Johnson's father worked picking cotton or sawing logs. Johnson lived two miles outside of downtown Hayti where he could hear the sounds carried across the fields and in the morning he could hear the sound of the ice machine in front of the store downtown and a lion roaring in the zoo.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_002, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Jason Miccolo spent the first eight and a half years of his life in rural Hayti, Missouri. His family lived on a farm and Johnson remembers the landlady's farm animals, the annual hog killings, playing with his neighbors' grandchildren and climbing over box cars for fun. During his childhood, Johnson learned to be careful around animals and other potential hazards in nature; and, learned valuable lessons about consequences and survival. Johnson saw great beauty in his childhood environment and his artistic outlook was shaped by his childhood observations and attention to detail. Johnson began school at Hayti Negro School. In 1965, Hayti integrated its schools and Johnson attended the white school for one day. The summer after Johnson's third grade year, his father died and Johnson moved to Memphis, Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson's father died of a heart attack in 1965. Following his death, Johnson and two of his older brothers went to live with their grandmother in Memphis, Tennessee who walked with a limp due to an earlier stroke. The change from a rural to an urban environment was a shock for Johnson. He attended Kansas Street Elementary School, then George Washington Carver High School in Memphis. Johnson talks about the TV shows he watched, his grandmother's party line telephone and his awareness of the Civil Rights Movement. His teachers fostered his interest in protest music of the era by playing the songs and taking students to cultural performances. Johnson remembers the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His grandmother died in 1968 and he and his siblings were split up again. He was sent to live with his mother's sister in Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_004, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson struggled in his transition from Hayti, Missouri to Memphis, Tennessee after his father's death in 1965. He developed an interest in photography as a student at George Washington Carver High School in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1971, he received his first camera as a Christmas gift from his brother and began earning money photographing his classmates. He eventually joined the school newspaper. His biology teacher gave him his second camera. After graduating from George Washington Carver High School in 1974, Johnson moved in with an older brother in St. Louis, Missouri. After struggling to find a job, he joined the U.S. Navy where he received on the job training and eventually became the second ranked photographer in his department. In the Navy, Johnson had the opportunity to travel and encounter people from diverse cultures.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_005, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson explains how his experience working as a photographer

in the U.S. Navy led to him studying journalism at Howard University in Washington, D.C. His memories of the Navy include reconnecting with a childhood friend, and some of his early experiences with journalism. He describes his foray into broadcast journalism for the Navy and working as editor for the Black Student Association newspaper at Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee. Although he had to leave his editorial position due to a disagreement with a new colleague, he continued to pursue his interest in journalism. While a freelance photographer in Memphis, Tennessee, Johnson had the opportunity to meet Ernest Withers and work with Mr. A. Cantrell, a mentor whose legacy was sadly neglected. In 1980, Johnson transferred to Howard, where he felt he would be more challenged. In reflecting on his experience there, he recognizes the large number of fellow students that went on to illustrious careers.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_001_006, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson called notable black photographer James Van Der Zee while attending Memphis State University, but Van Der Zee died before the two could meet. Johnson started a church newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee in 1983 and met P.H. Polk and HistoryMaker Gordon Parks through HistoryMaker Samuel Yette. Johnson later became friends with Parks when they were both promoting the book, 'Songs of My People.' In 2002, he planned Parks' 90th birthday party where he brought together ninety of the top black photographers, including HistoryMakers Chester Hines and Roy Lewis, for a group photograph. Some of Johnson's favorite photographs are a picture of Thurgood Marshall and a picture of HistoryMaker Colin Powell he took for 'Songs of My People.' He also took photographs at the Million Man March in 1995. He explains the importance of timing in photography, his preference for certain photographic styles, his preferred camera equipment and film, and the educational experiences that shaped him as a photographer.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_002_007, TRT: 0:28:05 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson managed the photography lab for USA Today from 1985 to 1989, which allowed him to travel and document sports and political events. As a freelance photographer, he photographed the Million Man March in 1995 as well as the follow-up Million Woman March in 1997 and Million Family March in 2000. He has photographed HistoryMaker Dorothy Height and Thurgood Marshall. Despite challenges, he obtained an important picture of Marshall that he fought to have included in 'Songs of My People' coffee table book. Johnson does primarily corporate work, but has an interest in documentary photography. He describes challenges of good shots, current young African-American photographers, and his hopes for the African-American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Jason Miccolo Johnson, Section A2003_166_002_008, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Jason Miccolo Johnson describes balancing solitude and community and some of his favorite photographers including HistoryMakers Ernest Withers, Bob Black and Gordon Parks. He considers what he would have done differently, how he would like to be remembered and his legacy. He concludes by narrating his photographs.